

## House Republican Press Release

September 12, 2005  
Press Office: 860-240-8700

### The Year of Steady Habits



*by Representative Sean Williams*

I have a saying posted in my office that I learned before I was elected to public office. It states: “If you keep on doin’ what you’ve been doin’, you’re gonna keep on gettin’ what you’ve been gettin.” Nothing makes those words ring true quite like reflection on the latest legislative session in Hartford.

Legislative Democrats who are the majority in both the state House and state Senate claimed that Connecticut would no longer be “the land of steady habits” when it came to public policy. This year was going to be “the year of change.” Instead; however, the 2005 session of the Connecticut General Assembly can probably best be described as “the year of disappointment,” or better yet, “the year the status quo prevailed.”

You would think that in this promised “year of change” we might see a change in the way the legislature conducts business. Yet, on the opening day of session on January 5th, legislative Democrats defeated several Republican proposals that would have opened the legislative process so that the light of day would shine brighter on the daily activities of the legislature, and that state government would be more accessible to the general public. The proposals, which included consolidating the legislature’s twenty-seven committees to save money, conducting budget negotiations in public rather than behind closed doors, and requiring pending legislation to be posted in public seventy-two hours before a legislative vote, were defeated by the Democrats on a party line vote. Had these changes been implemented it would undoubtedly have resulted in a more open and honest state government.

You would also think that a “year of change” would include reducing the state’s massive state budget and more importantly, relieving the nation’s highest taxed taxpayers from their unfairly high burden. The stage had been set for the legislature to give the taxpayers some relief. We had a surprisingly large budget surplus but instead of returning it to the taxpayers, the Democrats chose to spend in violation of the constitutional spending cap that had been imposed by 81% of the voters in the early 1990’s. In fact, \$650 million of the surplus was dedicated to new spending and taxes were increased overall by over \$738 million; a financial tragedy given that our state’s consumers/taxpayers and businesses are being crushed under the dead weight of big state government.

One also might think that given all of the grandstanding over campaign finance reform in the past year, the centerpiece of any “year of change” for legislative Democrats would have been a comprehensive campaign finance reform bill aimed at substantially reducing the special interest money in our elections. Indeed, in their rhetoric, it was one of the cornerstones of their legislative agenda and even had the support of Republican Governor M. Jodi Rell and the leaders of both the House and Senate Republican caucuses. Even with virtually no roadblocks to success in this area, legislative Democrats could not make this massive change happen. Instead, the House of Representatives debated one version of campaign finance reform in the wee hours of the morning on June 7th, the day before mandatory adjournment, while the Senate debated an entirely different campaign finance reform bill at the exact same time. Both versions passed their respective chambers but since both the House and the Senate need to pass the same bill before it can become law, neither actually became law.

Another change that never took place centers on the issue of unfunded state mandates. Democrats killed a committee proposal to form an unfunded mandates task force to study the specific effects of the state’s burdensome mandates on municipalities, particularly as it applies to education. Governor Rell feels so strongly on this issue that she pledged to bypass the legislature completely and create the task force by executive order, and once again doing what the legislature lacked the nerve and political courage to do.

Governor Rell’s remarkably favorable approval ratings over her first year as Governor have proven that quiet, steady leadership in our state will trump partisan politics any day of the week. I haven’t agreed with her on every issue, yet I respect the fact that she has made it her business to change significantly and permanently alter the way state government operates. However, thanks to an indifferent legislative majority, who has failed to become partners in banishing a system they claim to hate, much of the work remains undone. Until the majority decides to participate in effecting real change, the taxpayers of Connecticut will keep on gettin’ what they’ve been gettin’.